

Amendments to the Claims

Please amend the claims as follows:

1-14 (Cancelled)

15 (New) An apparatus for producing a compressed block of a soil material, the apparatus comprising:

 a compression chamber having a passage with an input portion for receiving the soil material, an open output end portion, and a longitudinal axis;

 a ramming plate axially movable along the longitudinal axis from a retracted position adjacent the input portion of the compression chamber to an extended position within the compression chamber for compressing and pushing the soil material out of the output end portion of the compression chamber; and

 a shearing device at the output end portion of the compression chamber, the shearing device being movable transverse to the longitudinal axis to shear a block of the compressed soil material exiting the compression chamber.

16. (New) The apparatus of claim 15, wherein the shearing device comprises a shearing chamber that has a passage with a transverse dimension that mates with the passage of the compression chamber, the shearing chamber being movable transverse to the longitudinal axis.

17. (New) The apparatus of claim 15, further comprising a hopper located above the input portion, wherein the hopper gravitationally feeds the soil material into the compression chamber from a direction perpendicular to the longitudinal axis.

18. (New) The apparatus of claim 15, further comprising an actuator that applies a longitudinal force to the ramming plate that is greater than an opposing frictional threshold force

of the soil material, to thereby advance the compressed soil material through the compression chamber.

19. (New) The apparatus of claim 15, wherein a stroke length of the ramming plate is less than an axial length of the compression chamber.

20. (New) The apparatus of claim 15, further comprising an angled structure protruding from a side of the ramming plate that contacts the soil material.

21. (New) The apparatus of claim 20, wherein the angled structure comprises a protrusion selected from the group consisting of: a cone, triangular wedge, a pyramid, and an angled flange.

22. (New) The apparatus of claim 15, further comprising a support structure mounted on a side of the shearing chamber opposite the compression chamber to support the block of compressed soil material sheared by the shearing device.

23. (New) The apparatus of claim 15, wherein the length of the passage of the shearing chamber is greater than 6 inches.

24. (New) The apparatus of claim 15, wherein the shearing chamber is adapted to produce a plurality of compressed blocks having a weight greater than 100 pounds.

25. (New) A method for producing a compressed block of a soil, the method comprising:

- (a) providing a compression chamber with an open outlet end and having a longitudinal axis;
- (b) introducing into the compression chamber an amount of uncompressed soil;
- (c) forcing the uncompressed soil toward the outlet end, and compressing the uncompressed soil into a compressed soil within the compression chamber; and

(d) causing a length of the compressed soil to extend out the outlet end of the compression chamber and protruding a selected increment of the compressed soil out from the outlet end of the compression chamber.

26. (New) The method of claim 25, wherein step (c) comprises pushing the compressed soil out the outlet end into a shearing chamber; and wherein step (d) comprises moving the shearing chamber relative to the compression chamber in a direction perpendicular to the longitudinal axis.

27. (New) The method of claim 25, wherein step (b) comprises gravitationally feeding the uncompressed soil into the compression chamber in a direction perpendicular to the longitudinal axis.

28. (New) The method of claim 25, wherein step (c) comprises applying pressure from an actuator to a ramming plate in an amount greater than an opposing frictional threshold force of the soil.

29. (New) The method of claim 28, further comprising monitoring the pressure with a computer system and stopping step (c) if a maximum pressure level is reached.

30. (New) The method of claim 25, wherein step (d) further comprises varying the lengths and weights of the increments of soil protruding from the compression chamber.

31. (New) The method of claim 25, wherein the increment of soil protruding from the compression chamber in step (d) has a length greater than 6 inches.

32. (New) The method of claim 25, wherein the increment of soil protruding from the compression chamber in step (d) has a weight greater than 100 pounds.

33. (New) A method for producing a compressed block of a soil, the method comprising:

- (a) providing a compression chamber with an open outlet end and having a longitudinal axis;
- (b) introducing into the compression chamber an amount of uncompressed soil by gravitationally feeding the uncompressed soil into the compression chamber in a direction perpendicular to the longitudinal axis;
- (c) applying pressure from an actuator to a ramming plate in an amount greater than an opposing frictional threshold force of the soil;
- (d) forcing the uncompressed soil toward the outlet end, and compressing the uncompressed soil into a compressed soil within the compression chamber; and
- (e) causing a length of the compressed soil to extend out the outlet end of the compression chamber and protruding a selected increment of the compressed soil out from the outlet end of the compression chamber.

34. (New) The method of claim 33 further comprising forming mating indentations and protrusions on at least some of the blocks; and aligning the indentation of one of the compressed blocks with a protrusion of another of the compressed blocks.